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SUBJECT: FM SHALOM EXPRESSES SKEPTICISM TO CODEL SAXTON ON  
ABBAS'S COMMITMENT TO DISMANTLE TERROR GROUPS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a March 30 meeting with Codel Saxton and the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Shalom expressed dissatisfaction with what he called Palestinian President Abbas's lack of effort to dismantle terrorist groups and the recent turn of roadmap discussions toward final status issues. He also discussed regional political changes, including those in Iraq, and their positive effects, and spoke extensively on his view of Syria's involvement in Lebanon. He said he was optimistic that change is forthcoming in Lebanon and negatively described Syria's involvement in that country and in promoting terrorist acts in Israel via Hizballah and Hamas. Shalom touched briefly on what he said is Iran's involvement with these terrorist groups as well, and expressed worry over Iran's possible attainment of nuclear weapons. He also expressed unhappiness over the State Department's travel advisory for Israel. END SUMMARY.

#### ----- Disengagement and the Roadmap -----

2. (C) Stressing that Abbas can do more for peace, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom expressed to Codel Saxton dissatisfaction with Abbas's attempts to work with extremist groups in Palestinian society. He said that Abbas "is not willing to forget them or to dismantle them; he is trying to achieve peace with them and that's unacceptable." Individual terrorists, he said, therefore will retain the ability to "blow up" the peace process. Shalom said that the number of recent successful bombing attacks in Israel is low not because Abbas has been successful in preventing them - or has even tried -- but because Israel's own security forces have been successful in catching and stopping suicide bombers.

3. (C) Moving to the disengagement plan, Shalom said that settler evacuations will not take long. He said Israel is coordinating with both Egypt and the U.S., and with the Palestinians "in some way." He was critical, however, of what he said were many negative statements coming from the Palestinian leadership. As an example, he said, Abbas offered to split with Hamas the assets and buildings that the Israelis will leave in Gaza after disengagement.

4. (C) Shalom reiterated Israeli support for the roadmap. At the same time, he stressed that the GOI wants to follow it step by step, and not "jump to final stage issues we still disagree about," citing the status of Jerusalem and settlements as examples.

#### ----- Regional Issues -----

5. (C) Shalom assessed that the situation in Iraq, while still an ongoing process, will soon stabilize. He said the world is much better without Saddam Hussein, and pointed to Saddam's fall from power, Arafat's death, and Qaddafi's change in attitude as reasons for optimism about the region's future.

6. (C) Shalom condemned Iran for supporting Hizballah, citing what he claimed have been Iranian shipments of weapons to Hizballah through the Damascus airport. He called Hizballah the long arm of Iran, and charged that it has taken over Saddam's role of giving money to families of suicide bombers. Shalom asserted that Iran -- through Hizballah -- has financed the creation of 60 new terror cells within Hamas. The necessary response to global extremism, he said, is to "empower the moderates and alienate the extremists." He also expressed concern over Iran's nuclear program.

#### ----- What the Future Holds for Lebanon and Syria -----

7. (C) Rep. Saxton commented that many Americans are "energized" by the possible cause and effect relationship between the transition in Iraq and recent events in Lebanon. Shalom expressed optimism for Lebanon's future and predicted that the Lebanese people will recover their freedom after 30 years of occupation. Noting that the current President Assad

did not, unlike his father in 1991, support U.S. intervention in Iraq, Shalom said that Assad "made a huge mistake by not following his dad's support of the U.S.," and since then he has made many mistakes, one after the other.

18. (C) Shalom attributed what he characterized as the new courage of the Lebanese people to demonstrate against Syria to three events: the Iraq elections, President Mubarak's opening of Egypt's presidential elections, and the above-noted leadership changes in Iraq, the PA, and Libya. He commented that Syria made a mistake, and angered the French, when it pushed the Lebanese parliament to amend the constitution so that President Lahoud could run for a third term. France sponsored UNSCR 1559, he said, because President Chirac wanted Hariri to be the next Lebanese president.

19. (C) While Shalom predicted that Syria will be compelled to leave Lebanon very soon due to grassroots Lebanese movements and American and French pressure, he thought Assad would try to stay as long as possible. Syrians, he said, traditionally consider Lebanon to be an extension of southern Syria. According to Shalom, this is why Syria never opened an embassy in Beirut, and did not allow the Lebanese to do so either in Damascus. He said that Syria is now trying to buy time and that it's more important to Syria "to stay in Lebanon than to have the Golan Heights." Other reasons given by Shalom for Syria's fight to stay in Lebanon are that 20 percent of Syrian labor works in Lebanon; Syria receives much income from operating a drug industry in Lebanon; and Lebanon is home to Hamas and Hizballah training camps. He said that Hizballah will do anything to protect Syria's engagement in Lebanon, which is why it has been arranging Lebanese mass demonstrations in favor of Syria.

110. (C) Shalom drew parallels between Hizballah and Hamas. He expressed concern about Hamas trying to emulate the Hizballah model of an organization with separate political and terrorist wings. He applauded the U.S. Congress for its assistance in trying to convince Europeans that Hizballah is a terrorist group and stated that Israel has been working hard to do the same.

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U.S. Travel Advisory  
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111. (C) Shalom called for the State Department to soften its travel advisory for Israel, calling the step necessary for Israel to gain revenue from tourism and foreign business investment. He said a new travel advisory would underline the emergence of a new era in Israel, one in which he claimed that Israelis have succeeded in normalizing relations with the Palestinians.

112. (SBU) Members of the Codel included Representatives Jim Saxton and Geoff Davis, professional staff member Tom Hawley, and Major Michael Hopkins of the U.S. Army.

113. (U) The Codel did not clear this message.

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